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ABSTRACT

A survey was made of 95 parents who had attended at least one of several workshops designed by the Lakewood Follow Through Program to provide curriculum-related parent education enabling parents to work with their children at home. The parent workshops were designed to increase (1) time spent by parents with the child at home, (2) the ability of parents to help children with their homework, (3) parents' comfort at school, especially with teachers, and (4) general parent participation in all Follow Through activities. A survey instrument based on the four objectives of the workshops was administered in person and by telephone. Additionally, a short checklist designed to detect changes in school-work behavior as a result of parental attendance, was given to teachers of children whose parents attended a workshop. Findings are discussed and the parent workshop survey instrument as well as the teacher checklist of student behavior are appended. (RH)

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PARENT EDUCATION AND INVOLVEMENT

A pilot study of its impact at the Lakewood, New Jersey Follow Through Program

1978-1979

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Abstract

Parent Involvement is an important component of Follow Through and parent education workshops have become a vital facet of this component in the Lakewood Program. The objectives of the parent workshops were to increase:

a. time spent by parents with the child at home.
b. the ability of parents to help children with their homework.
c. parents' comfort at school, specifically with the teacher.
d. general parent participation in all Follow Through activities.

Workshops included discussions, demonstrations and activities related to the child's work in the classroom and such special topics as health/nutrition, family budgeting and behavior problems/solutions.

In order to evaluate the parent education effort, simple survey instruments based on the four objectives were administered to 95 of the 103 parents who participated in the workshop program. In addition, a short checklist was given to teachers to evaluate the behavior of children of these parents.

The results suggested that the parent workshop program was successful. Parents reported that they spend more time with their children, are more comfortable with teachers, and are stimulated to learn more about their children and their children's schooling. A majority indicated preference for afternoon workshops at the Follow Through Center. Teachers reported parent workshop material brought to school, its use by pupils and siblings at home and improvement in parent and student interest and attitude. The study generated recommendations for specific pre and post surveys dealing with parent/child interaction. Finally, a longitudinal study (minimum three years) was suggested.

Introduction

> "These Follow Through workshops have given me confidence to open my mouth about what is going on in school with my daughter. I'm not afraid to go into school and talk with Tina's teacher about her behavior or her school work. In fact, it was from one of those talks that I learned about Tina's hearing problem. A year ago her father and I wouldn't have paid much attention, but the teacher's observations and a Follow Through workshop on health made us realize that we should have Tina tested. I also feel much more comfortable talking about children's problems without the worry of someone saying there must be something wrong with my child. We get to participate at Follow Through meetings, not just listen like at the PTA."

So spoke a parent, who, because of the Follow Through workshops, became more involved with her child's health and education. She also became more confident about the extent to which her input, along with that of other parents was considered during the planning of program activities.

The idea for parent involvement and parent education (i.e., parent-oriented workshops) is empirically based in psychological and educational research. Cognitive gains of pre-school children have been reported to be greatest when the children were supported academically and affectively, not just in school but also in the home (Shipman, et al. 1976). Where parents are enrolled in continuing education programs, the "educational growth of the child paralleled that of the parent" (Shipman, et al.). Furthermore a 1977 report on the evaluation data of the national Follow Through Program found the Florida/North Carolina Parent Education model to be the third most effective on the three per-

formance domains: basic skills, cognitive and affective (cited by Moore, 1978).

More recent evidence suggests that positive mother-child interaction promotes the development of the child's linguistic and problem solving skills (Epstein and Evans, 1979). Behavior where the child is an active participant in a learning situation and where mothers use questioning as a teaching strategy are positively related to measures of children's learning, even more so than socio-economic status. Thus, parental involvement appears to be beneficial to the child, but as Moore suggests, the effects need to be assessed.

In addition to being a major component of all Follow Through programs, parent involvement is further emphasized implicitly in the Tucson Early Education Model. The Lakewood Follow Through Program, which utilizes the Tucson Model, has made parent involvement one of, if not the most, significant component of their program. Direct contact is maintained between home and school through the efforts of social worker/community aides. Absenteeism is noted and help or referred information is provided to improve attendance. Most importantly, parent education workshops are conducted in the areas of health/nutrition, family budgeting, classroom curriculum content, and behavior problems/solutions.

An evaluation of the Lakewood Program by a private research firm recommended continued parent involvement, with more emphasis on parent education (Cohen and Edelman, 1975). During the 1978-1979 school year, a major objective was to strengthen and expand the parental participation component of the program. It was decided that the parent workshops

should be related to the curriculum, such that parents would be encouraged to work with their children at home. Specifically, the objectives of the parent workshops were to increase:

a. time spent by parents with the child at home.

b. the ability of parents to help children with their homework.

c. parents' comfort at school, specifically with the teachers.

d. general parent participation in all Follow Through activities.

Hence, attainment of these objectives and suggestions for future evaluation was of interest. A pilot-study of parents who had attended at least one workshop was taken and the results evaluated.

Method

The survey instrument was based on the four objectives of the workshops and devised by the Lakewood director, a member of the EIC-Central staff, and a parent. The survey was administered to 95 parents who had attended at least one workshop. Social worker aides and the parent coordinator administered the survey in person and by telephone. See Appendix A for a copy of the survey. The answers were coded and the resulting data were tabulated.

A short checklist was given to teachers of children whose parents attended a workshop. The purpose here was to detect any changes in the child's school-work behavior as a result of parental attendance. See Appendix B for a copy of the checklist. These answers were also coded and the resulting data were tabulated.

Results

Of administrative importance are the responses to questions dealing with announcement of workshops and subsequent attendance. The written notice

was effective in informing 51.3% of the parents. Telephone calls and home visits each notified 19.7%. In terms of attendance 50.5% were present for one workshop and 27.4% were present for two or three workshops. A large majority of the parents (82.8%) indicated that the afternoon sessions were more convenient than the morning sessions. Also, when given a choice, a majority (75.9%) would prefer meeting at the Follow Through center.

When asked about their reason for attending the workshops, most parents (82.2%) came to gain more general knowledge. Some parents (11%) came because of concern for their children's grades, and others gave the reason of behavior problems with their children. Almost all the parents (95.8%) responded that they learned some things and nearly half (46.5%) learned a lot.

The results suggest that the workshops put parents at ease with teachers and stimulated them to pursue their interests further. For example, 61.3% of the parents indicated that they felt more comfortable talking with their child's teacher. A large number of parents (47.9%) claimed to have continued learning because of the workshops and enrolled in courses at the community school.

More important are those responses that address the needs of the children. Specifically, a large majority of parents (86.9%) spend more time reading, talking, etc. with their children as a result of the workshops. Most all of the parents (97.3%) used things or ideas from the workshops with their children.

With respect to non-scholastic workshops, a rather small number of parents attended. Nevertheless, a majority always responded that they benefited from the workshops. For example, eight out of ten claimed they understood the health programs and screening tests better. Parents said they were more careful about their child's health habits (8 out of 10), learned a lot about balanced diets and menus (8/13), understood what team referrals means (6/8), spent shopping money more wisely (7/10), and were better able to handle discipline problems (8/13).

Students of parents attending the workshops were evaluated by their teachers according to various changes in perceived behavior towards schoolwork. The teachers rated the students on the basis of growth in interest - 48.5, amount of study - 37.5, reading - 49, math - 50.5, knowledge about health - 42.1. There was no statistically significant difference between these percentages (X^2 (6) = 10.53, $p > .1$), indicating that growth in one school-related area was no different from any other. One cannot say that the workshops had their influence. The children rated were not sorted by content-area of the workshop attended by their parent. Hence, growth in school interest may be related to parent attendance at a health workshop or a discipline workshop - there is no way to differentiate the cause.

Two lesser points of interest relate to negative growth or decline in certain behavior and parent produced material. Negative change never exceeded 7.3% and over 21% of the students brought material to school which had been prepared by the parent in the workshop.

Conclusions and Recommendations

For administrative purposes, the manner of workshop notification appears to be successful and ought to be continued. An effort should be made to increase the number of workshops attended by parents. The present survey indicates that a majority of the parents preferred afternoon workshops at the Follow Through center. This procedure was followed toward the end of the year and should be continued.

The workshops were clearly successful in providing information that was relevant to parents, since so many indicated that they learned things. The problem is to identify the things. Future evaluation should be centered around developing items on the survey that specifically get to the things parents were thinking about in their responses. For example, did parents learn something about all children, their children, teachers in general or their children's teachers? Also, did they learn directly from the workshop or as a result of investigating further on their own? The survey suggests that almost half of the parents went on to enroll in the community school. Answers to these questions will help the Program to guide parents in their learning using methods and topics that keep their interest and stimulate further thought. Similarly, it would be of interest to know what the parents meant when they said they attended the workshops to gain more knowledge.

The survey answers suggest that one success of the workshops was to ease the strain between parents and teachers. Continued emphasis in this area is important to the extent that teachers be encouraged to attend workshops and/or make presentations.

The critical results pertained directly to the children and were particularly encouraging. A large majority of parents used ideas presented at the workshops and spent more time with their children in academic-related activity. These findings alone suggest the success of the parent involvement and should provide support for continuation of the program. Further study is always necessary and would be expected to generate more information regarding the types of specific activities and ideas used by the parents.

The non-scholastic workshops appeared to be successful although the attendance was always low. The limited number of people that could be accomodated and the relative infrequency of these types of workshops may have contributed to low attendance. One obvious solution to this problem, if accomodation were the problem, would be to schedule repeat workshops. It might also be valuable to include in future surveys or through record-keeping what periods in the school year were workshop attendance best and why. More successful scheduling might then be planned with this information available.

The teacher evaluation was not altogether very informative. The reason was that the type of workshop attended by the parent was unavailable and this confounded with any behavior change. More specific information should also be collected. For example, what workshops did the parent attend and how long ago from the time the teacher rated the child. The teacher's judgment is also affected by past experience with the child. With short checklists like the one available, teachers may not reflect on the child's behavior specifically but on a more overview (gestalt) that is biased for each child.

On the basis of this pilot study, the parent workshop is a successful program. Generally, parents spend more time with their children, are more comfortable with teachers, and are stimulated to learn more about their children and their children's schooling. The quality of the survey instrument needs improvement in the direction of more specific questions with clear, differentiated choices for answers. Furthermore, the instrument should be expanded to include the points mentioned earlier. It would also be valuable to conduct a survey of parents dealing with parent/child interaction before the workshops begin and conduct the same survey after the workshops are completed. This pretest-posttest technique better controls the variables that are related to maturation and the passage of time. Lastly, Gordon (1978) states that efforts to involve parents takes time and adequate assessment must be part of a longitudinal study (minimum of three years). Thus, judgments as to the effectiveness of a program so complex or the effects on students of parental involvement take time to study - answers cannot be gotten quickly. He further suggests that local groups work with university people to get the best possible longitudinal study design followed by analysis.

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APPENDIX A

PARENT WORKSHOP SURVEY INSTRUMENT

LAKEWOOD FOLLOW THROUGH
Parent Workshop Questionnaire

Parent's Name _____

1. How did you find out about the workshops?

___ notice brought home by my child
___ telephone call
___ home visit by the Follow Through Social Worker Aide
___ other parents
___ teacher
___ other: _____

2. What was the real reason for your coming to the workshops?

___ worried about my child's grades
___ not happy about my child's behavior in school
___ just to learn about what my child is doing in school
___ to get out of my house/apartment
___ to meet other parents and friends

3. Did you learn more about your child's ___ schoolwork ___ health ___ nutrition ___ behavior after coming to the workshops?

___ I learned a lot.
___ I learned some things.
___ I learned very little.

SCHOOLWORK

4. Because of the workshops, do you think that you spend more time with your child (reading, talking)?

___ I spend a lot more time.
___ I spend a little more time.
___ I spend the same amount of time I always have.
___ I spend a little less time.
___ I spend a lot less time.

5. Did you use the things you made in the workshops with your child?

___ Yes
___ No

- - - -

HEALTH

6. After going to the workshops, do you think you understand the health programs and screening tests used in the district?

___ I understand a lot more.
___ I understand it the same.
___ I understand less.

7. Because of the workshops, do you think you are more careful about your child's (children's) health habits?

___ I am much more careful than I used to be.
___ I'm the same as I was.
___ I am not as careful as I used to be.

8. Because of the workshops, do you understand what a team referral means?

___ I understand it a lot better.
___ I know just as much as I always did.
___ I understand it less than I used to.

NUTRITION

9. Because of the workshops do you think you learned about balanced diets and healthful menus?

___ I learned a lot.
___ I learned some things.
___ I learned very little.

10. Because of the workshops, do you think you spend your shopping money more wisely?

___ I'm a much better shopper.
___ I'm the same kind of shopper I always was.
___ I'm a worse shopper than I used to be.

BEHAVIOR

11. As a result of the workshops, do you think you've learned ways to handle discipline problems, instead of punishing your child?

___ I learned a lot.
___ I learned some things.
___ I learned very little.

12. After going to the workshops, do you feel more comfortable about talking to your child's teacher?

___ I feel much more comfortable.
___ I feel the same as I always have.
___ I feel a lot less comfortable.

13. Have you done something to continue learning because of the workshops?

___ I took (am taking) courses in the Community School.
___ I took (am taking) college courses.
___ Other: _____

14. What would make it easier for you to attend workshops next year?

Time ___ (a) workshops held from 9:15-11:15
___ (b) workshops held from 1-3

Place ___ (a) workshops held at Follow Through Office
___ (b) workshops held at the elementary schools
___ (c) workshops held at neighborhood homes

COMMENTS:

APPENDIX B

TEACHER CHECKLIST OF STUDENT BEHAVIOR

LAKEWOOD FOLLOW THROUGH
Teacher Checklist

Teacher's Name _____

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY	Child's Name	Interest Enthusiasm	Behavior Work Habits	Reading Language	Math	Health Habits	Mentioned Working With Parents *	Brought in Materials **
1 2 3 4	_____	3 2 1	3 2 1	3 2 1	3 2 1	3 2 1	Y N	Y N
1 2 3 4	_____	3 2 1	3 2 1	3 2 1	3 2 1	3 2 1	Y N	Y N
1 2 3 4	_____	3 2 1	3 2 1	3 2 1	3 2 1	3 2 1	Y N	Y N
1 2 3 4	_____	3 2 1	3 2 1	3 2 1	3 2 1	3 2 1	Y N	Y N
1 2 3 4	_____	3 2 1	3 2 1	3 2 1	3 2 1	3 2 1	Y N	Y N
1 2 3 4	_____	3 2 1	3 2 1	3 2 1	3 2 1	3 2 1	Y N	Y N
1 2 3 4	_____	3 2 1	3 2 1	3 2 1	3 2 1	3 2 1	Y N	Y N
1 2 3 4	_____	3 2 1	3 2 1	3 2 1	3 2 1	3 2 1	Y N	Y N
1 2 3 4	_____	3 2 1	3 2 1	3 2 1	3 2 1	3 2 1	Y N	Y N

KEY: 3 - Positive change, definite growth.
2 - Little or no change.
1 - Negative change, deterioration in skill or attitude.

* Has the child ever mentioned working with his/her parents on school work?

** Has the child ever shared (verbally, or by bringing to class) materials used with his/her parents?

5/79